Christian Warfare, Victory and Crown.

A SERMON

ON

OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF THE

REV. SAMUEL C. STRATTON,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY, PHILADELPHIA,

NOVEMBER 11, 1860.

BY THE

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RECTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY.

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SERMON.

I AM NOW READY TO BE OFFERED, AND THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE IS AT HAND. I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH; HENCEFORTH THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, SHALL GIVE ME AT THAT DAY.—2 *Timothy*, iv. 6, 7, 8.

THE Apostle Paul was at this time a prisoner in Rome, for the truth, he had so much loved, and so faithfully proclaimed. He was hourly anticipating a martyr's death, for the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. While thus standing on the verge of both worlds, in calmly reviewing the past, which had been devoted to the cause of Christ, he says: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Then casting his reflections forward into futurity, more sublime and enrapturing visions broke on his triumphant spirit: "There is henceforth laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

This too was something of the experience of that venerable servant of Christ, who is gone to receive his reward. In reviewing the past he could rejoice; and, in the antici-

pation of the future, he could triumph. Oh! this is not the gloomy language of scepticism, but of a martyr and a christian, awaiting his dismissal from a world of sorrow, to the realms of endless bliss. This dispels the gloom from the grave; this cheers and illumines the pathway to the tomb; this wipes away the bitter tear of the mourner, that lingers behind; this deprives the last enemy of his sting; this sustains the soul amid "the wreck of nature," and opens to the departing spirit a survey of the cloudless mansions of joy, to which it is about to take its everlasting flight.

The Apostle, in the circumstances in which he was now placed, is a fair representative of all *faithful* ministers, especially such as have reached old age, who have the prospect of death immediately before them. They are not indeed, like the Apostle, shut up in prison, and waiting for the command to lay their heads upon the block; but they are, like Paul, fully aware that they have but a little while to stay, and are calling into exercise all their spiritual energies that they may glorify their Master in the last conflict.

I. Let us notice, the reflections which the Apostle, in the prospect of his departure, makes upon his past life.

"I am now ready to be offered." This is the sweet experience of the man of God. There are in his mind no fearful forebodings, no anxious pangs, no tremulous apprehensions rising to wrap the soul in the mists of obscurity, while treading the margin of the grave. How

many express an ardent desire for that world of peace and rest awaiting the believer, but how seldom do they properly consider the essential, the indispensible preparation for such a state. If there is one thing in the universe of God more pleasing to the mind than all others, it is to see the Christian completely prepared for heaven. There he stands, when life wears to a close, and the twilight shadows of the evening are flinging themselves around him, with his lamp trimmed, and being brilliantly wrapped in a robe without a stain, waiting only for the fiery chariot and the convoy of angels to conduct his happy spirit to Abraham's bosom.

"The time of my departure is at hand." The word rendered "departure" means sometimes the dissolution or breaking up of any thing into its parts; as, for example, in a mortal man, the separation of soul and body, the release of the spirit from its house of clay; or else it is a maratime expression of a ship weighing anchor, loosening its cable, and setting sail. In this beautiful metaphor, St. Paul represents himself as about quitting this land where he had sojourned as a stranger, and returning homeward, after the toils and dangers of a life passed for the most part in the midst of death, to be at rest in his own home, in his Father's house, in the many mansions which his Lord had assured to every sincere believer, were prepared for him in heaven.

"I have fought a good fight." He had been a good soldier in the cause of Christ. The life of every Christian

may well be compared to a warfare. And hence all the various graces which the Spirit implants in the heart wear a military aspect. In the 6th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, they are likened to the arms of soldiers; and they are those in which the good soldier of Jesus Christ wages warfare. He is engaged in a perpetual struggle—a struggle which admits of no cessation or truce—a struggle with those natural dispositions which are not as yet subdued; with the powers of darkness; with the present evil world, which aims to subdue by its smiles or terrify by its frowns—a warfare in which there is no flourishing of trumpets, no clashing of arms, no garments dyed in blood; but, like the battles of spirits, though unseen yet real, and most important in its results.

And what is true of every christian, is pre-eminently true of every christian minister. He is "set for the defense of the Gospel." He must contend with infidelity and vice, and error, in all their various forms—"contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints." And he must continue in the contention until he is called away by death, or by the summons of his Master. This is the commission given to him:—"Be thou faithful *unto death*, and I will give thee a crown of life." Paul's life after he was called to the sacred office, was a constant succession of conflicts with ignorance and error, and corruption? It was his privilege however, as it has been of many ministers since, to reflect that he had brought the whole strength of his mind and spirit to the work in

which he was engaged; that whatever imperfections might have attended his ministry, his zeal and courage on the whole, had never wavered or faltered.

But the Apostle designates this "a good fight." *Good*, for it is *in* one of the best causes; not that of contention, rapacity, ambition or tyranny, but the cause of God, the cause of human happiness, the cause for which the Redeemer laid down his life—the noblest cause to which the heart of man or angel ever beat. St. Paul loved and honored this cause as a Christian; but it is especially in the character of a christian minister that he contemplates it in our text. He felt that it was a good work in which he was engaged: the work of spreading abroad the knowledge of the great salvation; of endeavoring to save the lost, to increase the Redeemer's triumphs, and to bring glory to God in the highest.

"I have finished my course." This expression is an allusion to the race practiced at the Grecian games. In this race, the competitors put forth every exertion to outstrip each other in their course, taking care not to encumber themselves with anything which would impede their progress, while at the goal stood the judges, with crowns or garlands of leaves, with which to crown the victor. This bore so strong a resemblance to the christian race of holiness, that the Apostle frequently alludes to it, especially in his letters to Grecian Churches. "Know ye not that they who run in a race, run all, but one obtaineth the prize?" "So run," says he "that ye may obtain."

He would teach us by this comparison, that to fulfill the christian course, calls for continual and unwearied exertion. We are never to relapse into indolence, but to make every effort, as much as if the event continued uncertain, till, by reaching the goal, we become sure of the prize. For such great and continual exertion, we need to be temperate in all things; to lay aside every weight, and to avoid being overcharged with anything which would prevent us from running well, or succeeding to reach the goal. We need also the grace of the ascended Jesus, we need to look for encouragement to his own bright example, and for hope to the crown of rejoicing, which he will give to all who come off conquerors in the race; to be animated by the example of all those who had gone before us. "Therefore," he says, "Seeing we are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight; and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience, the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Every part of the Apostle's life, as recorded, agrees with this account of his race of holiness. It was a life of unceasing and vigorous activity. But his race was now run, he was closing the last Epistle that he ever wrote—he had reached the goal at his grave. "I have finished the course" assigned me; I have so run that I am sure of the prize. Fortified by divine power,

upheld by divine grace, other ministers have persevered to the end as truly as Paul; and though, in looking back upon their course, they have seen much of infirmity and imperfection, yet they have been permitted to reflect that by the grace of God, they have served their Master with some good degree of fidelity, till he was ready to dismiss them to their reward in the realms of eternal peace.

But the Apostle declares also: "I have kept the faith." This doubtless refers to the glorious doctrines of the Gospel of the Son of God. The Trinity, on which the whole scheme of Redemption was founded; the supreme divinity and perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus as the great object of Christian faith and worship; the native depravity and helplessness of fallen man; gratuitous acceptance with God through the righteousness of Christ; regeneration and sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit; the resurrection; the final glory that should be awarded to the righteous, and the fearful destination awaiting the ungodly. His penetrating eye distinctly saw the connection between these vital doctrines of our faith, and all that is experimental and practical in religion and to them he had been faithful. He had much to do with his own countrymen, to whom the Christian faith was a stumbling block; much to do with the enlightened and polished heathen, to whom the distinctive doctrines of Christianity were foolishness; much to do with those who were only half converted from Judaism, and who sought to maintain the authority of the old system in connection

with the new; but, amidst all the varying forms of doubt and unbelief which he had to encounter, he stood firm as a rock in defense of that system of truth which, as an Apostle, he had received from the Lord Jesus as a sacred, sublime, Divine deposit. He anathematized false doctrine. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed." Did he mean that he should exult in the eternal ruin of any human being? No; his simple feeling was, an acquiescence in God's opposition to a false christianity, because that secures the destruction of the soul. And when he came to the close of life, he had the satisfaction to reflect that he had kept the faith —that he had guarded it, defended it, kept it faithfully. And herein also, he has had a multitude of followers—ministers without number who have kept the faith which has come down to them through Paul, and have shown themselves valiant in defending it, and faithful in proclaiming it, even at the expense of the greatest worldly sacrifices, and in the face of the most determined and malignant opposition.

II. Let us now notice briefly the pleasing prospect of the future, that opened to the mind of the Apostle at this precise period. His earthly labors and conflicts are nearly closed; he has, as wisdom would dictate, reviewed his course in the prospect of his departure, and his conscience bears witness to his fidelity. Now he glances an eye upon the future, and behold, what glories rise before him! "Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteous-

ness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day."

This, was no idle reverie, no wild enthusiasm, no imaginary wandering of a diseased mind. He could see the diadem of glory glittering through the clouds; a crown purchased by the righteousness of the Redeemer given freely. The course was finished, the battle was fought, the victory was won, and now the wreath, the laurel, and the green palm of glory is his.

This is not only "a crown of righteousness," but a "crown of *life*,"—a life of the most exquisite felicity, a life of the most unutterable pleasure; a soul drinking copiously of the fountain of life, sitting beneath the shadow of the tree of life plucking of its immortal fruits, where "there is fullness of joy and pleasure that are for evermore." Life, where there is no death—life, where the anxious pang shall never heave the breast, where the tear shall never bedew the cheek, but shall live for ever "before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and serve him day and night in his temple for ever and ever."

But again, my brethren, this crown shall be a "crown of *glory*"—bright with glory, all glory, unmixed glory, without a stain, without a tarnish. The stars of heaven shall pale before it, and the sun shall be enveloped in gloom when it appears. Oh! it is such glory as mortal eye has never gazed upon; such glory as the human heart can never conceive of; such glory as the ear of man has never heard of. Oh! it is an exceeding weight of glory.

But again, unlike all human glory, and unlike all other crowns, this is "a crown that *fadeth not away*." Crowns, and captors, and princes meet and mingle in the dust; all earthly glory is destined to pass away; the worm is at the gourd, the moth is at the garment, the rust is on the gold, the canker is gathering on the diadem, but the christian's crown of glory shall never fade; nor shall the lapse of years, nor the rolling ages of eternity, dim the brightness of its lustre.

"The Lord, the righteous Judge, shall *give* it me." Who can fail to admire the freeness of the gift, the unmerited character of the gift—the gift of love, the gift of mercy, the gift of God?

"At *that day*"—the day of Christ's appearing. Though death is, in some sense, the gate of glory, inasmuch as for the believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, yet it is not till the day of Christ's second appearing to judge the world, that the full measure of glory will be awarded. Then, when the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the mysteries of human existence shall be solved, and the great mediatorial work shall reach its consummation—then shall be brought forth the crown of righteousness which had been laid up in the purpose and promise of God, and in the purchase and guardianship of his son.

Blessed is the dying Christian! The days of the years of his pilgrimage are now ended. The glories of an immortal life will in a few moments blaze upon his eye. He

looks behind him and sees the wilderness passed over; he looks before him and is entranced with the visions of immortality!

Thrice blessed is the dying faithful minister of Jesus Christ! He has reached the connecting point between earth and heaven, which commands a view both of the service which he has rendered, and of the reward which awaits him. Many enemies he has had to encounter, but behold him now retiring more than conqueror, through him who loved him. The faith committed to him he has guarded, defended, kept; and he knows that it has not suffered in his keeping. He feels that in the service he has rendered, there has been after all, much of infirmity; and yet, by God's grace abounding through Jesus, he is permitted to look forward to the crown. Perhaps there are in that crown many gems, in each of which he recognizes an immortal soul saved through his instrumentality. Dying servant of Christ, thou canst afford to look now with contempt on the brightest crown that ever glittered on a monarch's brow; for all earthly splendor pales to darkness, when brought into comparison with the glory of that crown which awaits thee.

Surely, my christian friends, none of you will doubt that this train of thought is in harmony with the spirit of the occasion which has convened us. The venerable servant of Christ, whose removal has occasioned the present service, has, at the bidding of his Master laid by his armor, yielded up his commission, and gone to receive his

crown. It is due to his character, and to the position which he occupied long and honorably in the Church of Christ, that I should speak of him with respect and affection at such a moment as this; as, however, nothing was more opposed to his principles and taste than labored eulogy, I am bound to speak with brevity and simplicity.

Our venerated brother, the Rev. Samuel C. Stratton, was born in Gloucester county, New Jersey, May 10th, 1794. At the age of eighteen he was converted to Christ, and became a communicant in Trinity Church, Swedesboro, N. J. In this church, after graduating at the College at New Brunswick, he was ordained deacon, by Bishop Croes, June 8th, 1817. He was ordained priest in St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, by Bishop Kemp of Maryland, September 20th, 1818. His first charge was in Somerset county, Md., where with the parishes he labored for about three years, when he removed to Snow Hill and Berlin, in the same diocese. In 1831, he accepted a call to Newton, Conn. In this large field (with two hundred and ten families and a neighborhood chapel) his health gave way, and being seized with hemorrhage of the lungs, he resigned after a rectorship of eight years. After a year of needful rest he was again at work, choosing small charges in healthful situations. His last charge was Clarksboro, N. J., where he spent six years, from April, 1850. Of late he resided in Philadelphia, and was at the time of his decease a regular attendant at the Church of the Epiphany.

His ministry has been eminently blessed in respect to the measure of divine influence which has attended it.

As a Christian, it would be difficult to name a man of more unquestionable character than our departed brother. The evidence he gave of this, was the evidence to which the Scriptures attach the highest importance: That is, a life devoted to the service of God, and regulated by the faith and precepts of the Gospel. His pious affections had both strength and ardor, though they were remarkably sedate and rational. The grace that always struck me as most prominent in his character was humility. This had been so wrought into his soul by the Holy Spirit that it had all the graceful bearing of a native quality. He showed his humility before God, especially in his prayers; for, though as free as possible from affected tones, and all other signs of artificial sanctity, there was a manifest depth and power in his confessions of sin and unworthiness, that could consist only with a spirit that had been thoroughly trained to the business of self-communion. He was deeply and tenderly conscientious; the whole world was too poor to make him deliberately do a wrong thing, even a doubtful thing. He was uniformly discreet and conciliatory in his intercourse, and was always slow to impute a bad motive where a good one might be supposed; and this was especially true in respect to his own brethren; they might do some things which he disapproved, they might hold some views of Christian doctrine and duty to which he could not subscribe; but the charity that hopeth

all things, had its perfect work in both his judgment and his treatment of them. He was slow to speak of anything which related particularly to himself. But there were times when he unbosomed his religious feelings with a degree of freedom. From his conversation at such times, it was abundantly evident that he walked with God, and made it his object to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our venerated friend was a man of prayer. All who knew him, knew that he was a devout man, one who held constant intercourse with God, in public and private, in set seasons and in ejaculations, who prayed daily and earnestly over his temporal concerns, as well as over his spiritual interests, with whom the prosperity of Christ's cause was a constant subject of interest and of fervent desire.

He was sincerely and avowedly attached to the peculiarities of his own denomination, but he was remarkably free from a bigoted or sectarian spirit. He extended the hand of Christian fellowship to all in whom he could trace the characters of genuine Christianity. He loved his Saviour's image wherever he caught its reflection. He was a zealous advocate for Christian union, upon the basis of agreement in the belief of fundamental doctrines and toleration in things of minor importance.

As a minister of the Gospel, he was distinguished for the excellencies of his character. And in that most important of all earthly offices, *faithfulness* was a leading

characteristic, to which I refer with the more pleasure, because we live in times when this essential quality of a minister of God is rare, and when the most conscientious pastors are under strong temptations to please men, not to their edification, but at the expense of their immortal interests. Hence those ministers who cordially receive the great truths of the Gospel into their own hearts, and who faithfully apply them to the hearts and consciences of their people—who mark distinctly the vast difference between a cold and barren profession of Christianity and practical piety—who, in a word, show that Christianity is more than a name or a system of mere opinions—are not likely to secure the cordial approbation of mere nominal professors, though they may extort from them, as is often the case, an internal conviction of their integrity. Those ministers, therefore, who preach faithfully to the souls of men, and seriously urge them to forsake their sins, to surrender their worldly and ungodly practices, to come out from the world, and to serve God daily from right principles and motives, are worthy of double honor; and to that class of faithful men our departed brother certainly belonged. He felt the power of truth upon his own heart, and was convinced that a faithful exhibition of it to the minds and consciences of men, was essential to ministerial success. The grand themes of his ministry were those doctrines of the Gospel which are characteristically and appropriately denominated the doctrines of grace, of which Christ and him crucified is the sum and substance. And

having laid a solid foundation for a sinner's hope and Christian practice in the inculcation of these, like a wise master-builder, he proceeded to raise the superstructure of a holy and godly practice. Denying the merit of good works, as constituting any solid ground of justification before God, he nevertheless urged them as indispensable, as the fruits of true faith, and as essential to Christian obedience.

Nor did he fail to encourage and animate the true Christian in his heavenly course, by assuring him of the faithfulness of God to his promises. He fed himself upon the blessed truth that where God begins a good work in the heart of a sinner, he will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ; and, therefore, wished to impart of the heavenly food to the souls committed to his charge. He believed that God would never leave or forsake the objects of his love. And as his doctrine was sound and scriptural, so his style and manner of preaching were simple, perspicuous, and dignified. His sermons were well studied, methodically arranged, and in plain and appropriate language, addressed equally to the understanding and consciences of his hearers. And under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, who alone can make any ministry effectual, they were calculated to awaken the careless sinner, and especially to build up the true Christian in his most holy faith; and no doubt were much blessed to both those ends.

Suffer me now to acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of God in sparing him so long; and that at last he

was saved the pain of a dying hour; so that it might be said he did not die, but fell asleep in Jesus. Death performed his office rather as an angel of mercy than as the king of terrors. So soft and noiseless was his step as not to disturb his slumber. It had all the happiness of sudden dissolution, unaccompanied by its surprise. The bidding farewell to friends was dispensed with; the protracted physical agony that often attends the last hour, watching of the monster's progress towards the end of his work—all, all were dispensed with. He tasted not the bitterness of death. And though it was not given him to bear audible testimony, with his departing voice, to his personal reliance on the power and grace of that Saviour, in whom he had trusted through life, and the glory and efficacy of whose cross he had so anxiously labored to commend to others; in his case, such an oral testimony was in no wise necessary, however desirable it might otherwise have been. He had lived by the faith, and he died in the hope of the Gospel—gently breathing out his spirit, without a struggle, into the hands of the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

To his bereaved family there is everything to say that is consolatory. Such was his character that you will ever have occasion to contemplate it with gratitude and pleasure. His memory is fragrant with all that is estimable in human nature, and sanctified by the Spirit of holiness. And you need no assurance from behind the veil, that the

moment his absence from the body commenced, his presence with the Lord also began. You think of him now as moving about in blood-washed robes, and taking part in the praises of angels. And you can have no other than grateful associations even with his grave; for his flesh will rest in hope, and the body that comes forth will be recast in the mold of immortality. Give thanks, my mourning friends, that your bereavement is illuminated with a glorious light from beyond the tomb.

To the members of this church his death is a deeply solemn event. We shall meet him no more in this sanctuary, nor in the circle of prayer, nor in social intercourse. It was his earnest desire and prayer, brethren, that you might be established immovably in the belief and love of the truth, and that its blessed fruits might be exhibited in your lives. Follow him, brethren, as he followed Christ. Let us all strive to be prepared to meet him in a more permanent and blissful intercourse above.

My brethren in the ministry, shall we not open our hearts fully to the influence of his pure and elevated example? We have admired his faith and patience, his consistency, his unbending integrity, his zeal for God's truth and honor, while he was on earth; shall we be less inclined to honor and imitate these exalted qualities, now that he has passed from the church militant to the church triumphant? Let us, brethren, adore that grace which made him what he was, and learn to depend upon it more and more to make us what we ought to be. And when

we come to stand upon the point he has already past, which commands a view of the world that is disappearing and the world that is opening, may we, like him, like Paul, like thousands of faithful ministers of Christ, be able to say: "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day."

[*From the Episcopal Recorder.*]

At a meeting of the clergy and laity of our city, held in the Lecture room of St. Andrew's Church on Thursday evening, November 8th, Bishop Potter being in the chair, the Rev. J. W. Cracraft offered the following preamble and resolution:

The late Rev. Samuel C. Stratton, of New Jersey, but for some time resident in this city, having, by the providence of God, been called suddenly from among us:

Resolved, That we, his brethren in the ministry, recognize in the life and ministerial character of our deceased fellow laborer, a beautiful and consistent example of Christian fidelity; and in his sudden death, a solemn providence with its warning voice "be ye also ready."

Resolved, That we sincerely sympathize with his afflicted family in this hour of their severe bereavement, and desire that the expression of such sympathy be communicated to them.

The above resolutions, having been seconded by the Rev. Henry W. Ducachet, D. D., were passed unanimously.

The Rev. Dr. Ducachet, then offered the following, which was adopted:

Resolved, That the Rev. Mr. Cracraft present a copy of these resolutions to the afflicted family of the deceased, and to the editors of the *Episcopal Recorder* and the *Banner of the Cross.*